United Nations E/CN.6/2012/NGO/66

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
8 December 2011

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-sixth session
27 February-9 March 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern, and further actions and initiatives; priority theme: "The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges"

Statement submitted by Canadian Federation of Agriculture, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.6/2012/1.

11-62869 (E) 110112

Please recycle

Statement

To create the key policies a rural woman needs, we must consider the many roles that a woman plays. She is a farmer and a mother. She is a breadwinner and probably a bread maker. She is ready to invest in her children and eager to protect the Earth.

She faces economic and social constraints. Women account for 60 to 80 per cent of smallholder farmers and produce 90 per cent of food in Africa and about half of all food worldwide. Yet in sub-Saharan Africa, only 15 per cent of landholders are women, and they receive less than 10 per cent of credit and 7 per cent of extension services. Policies that address gender inequalities could, conservatively, increase yields on women's farms by 2.5 per cent to 4 per cent. Women are key to food and nutrition security and sustainable development.

We need to empower rural women through policies that will help them in growing, marketing, conserving, adapting, caring, connecting and leading. Following are some recommendations.

Growing

- Develop a registration process for land tenure that is local, cheap, rapid, transparent and accessible for women
- Support women smallholder farmers by providing them with agricultural extension services, grain storage, infrastructure, information and technologies
- Localize the application of agronomic knowledge and pest identification and meteorological information
- Provide microfinance services, especially for microcredit, to women farmers
- Ensure that women farmers have access to agricultural inputs and services, including mechanical tools, breeding stock, seeds, fertilizers and crop protection materials
- Encourage and coordinate multiple local actors to ensure that information and supplies get into farmers' hands

Marketing

- Build local storage facilities and transportation mechanisms, including cold chain storage for food preservation
- Provide remote access to up-to-date market pricing information
- Develop well-functioning markets through transparent information, fair prices, sound infrastructure and proper regulation
- Empower farmers in organizational frameworks and encourage them to organize in marketing groups and cooperatives
- Improve smallholder farmers' marketing skills through entrepreneurship training
- Reduce market distortions to improve opportunities for all strata of agriculture worldwide

Conserving

- Invest in women farmers who are engaged in conservation agriculture to prevent soil erosion and land degradation
- Support programmes that help women farmers to manage watersheds and use water more efficiently
- Protect wildlife habitat and biodiversity through an integrated ecosystems approach that incorporates women's knowledge and leadership
- Promote sound management of chemical substances, including through the improvement of health and safety conditions for agricultural workers
- Invest in bioenergy where it contributes to energy security and to rural development

Adapting

- Provide early warning systems such as community-based disaster preparedness and management, and early weather forecasting systems to help them make decisions relating to sustainability and productivity
- Use a knowledge-based approach of best practices, commit to increasing support for farmer-to-farmer training, including specific programmes for women farmers, and value their traditional knowledge
- Popularize new policies, extension programmes, practices and technologies for beneficiaries in their languages and considering their level of education
- Ensure women farmers have access to stress-, flood- or drought-resistant seed varieties
- Support community-based, small-scale renewable bio-energies
- Make adaptation funds, risk management programmes and training on climate change impacts available to rural women

Caring

- Increase food security by investing in infrastructure, which includes roads, hospitals, clean water facilities, warehouses, schools and other initiatives to keep rural families together
- Require mandatory school programmes for girls and boys, along with social protection programmes and available child care
- Provide educational support for girls and women through training facilities, scholarships, mentoring, extension services and other forms of technical assistance
- Ensure access to proper maternal health services for women and focus particularly on nutrition for the first 1,000 days of mother and child
- Empower women in their roles as household managers and caregivers, which is a proven strategy for enhancing food security and nutritional outcomes, especially for children

Connecting

- Promote the development of village-based knowledge centres
- Support women's cooperatives and their participation in mixed cooperatives
- Increase the number of women extension agents and train male extension agents to become more gender sensitive
- Prioritize women's access to information communication technologies
- Establish open and transparent two-way exchanges that capture the "voice of the farmer" in the process of policy formulation and implementation

Leading

- Enhance capacity for leadership and alliances among rural women to build confidence, strengthen mutual support and develop advocacy and public speaking skills for influencing decisions that affect their lives
- Facilitate meaningful participation of women farmers in decision-making processes through mandatory quotas, benchmarks and indicators
- Foster the engagement of farmer organizations in policymaking on agriculture and rural development at international, national and regional levels